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U.S. looks for microwave-fight detente

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Washington—With Anatoly F. Dobrynin back in town, United States officials hope for early peace in the microwave battle around the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

The next step, one said, is to learn whether Mr. Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador, brought terms of settlement from Moscow. If not, then the U.S. may go public with the whole story about microwave bombardment of the embassy, including formal protests.

American objectives, according to the official version, are simple: "We want it turned off."

Meanwhile, a medical technician is retesting the blood of embassy staff members to learn whether white cell counts are alarmingly low. Similar tests in February, when the issue first appeared in public, showed higher than average counts—but no one was certain whether they were caused by microwave emissions or the high incidence of influenza.

Technical measurements of the emission rate have showed fluctuations recently. On the one hand the rate of 13 microwatts per square centimeter in January dropped to 3 microwatts in March. But last month, the rate went back near the original figure.

All of these levels are well within the U.S. industrial safety standard of 10 milliwatts per square centimeter, for a milliwatt equals 1,000 microwatts. But the whole debate has taken on political and psychological overtones apart from any possible health hazard—about which no one seems certain.

White blood cells increase to fight disease, such as the flu. But one manifestation of leukemia is a rampant increase in the cell count.

Bombardment of the embassy with microwave emissions from electronic devices first was disclosed in February. Whether the Russians are listening in on the Americans, or trying to prevent the Americans from listening in on them, or perhaps both, never has been made public. Later reports said the practice had continued at least since 1959—when it was discovered during the visit of Richard M. Nixon, then vice president.

Acknowledging the problem, Henry A. Kissinger, the Secretary of State, refused to go into detail. It was a matter of "great delicacy" with "many ramifications," he said, and the U.S. was making every effort to eliminate any danger to the embassy staff.

Since then, embassy employees have been tested and reassured. Aluminum screens were installed in the embassy. The State Department has refused to confirm or deny reports that Ambassador Walter J. Stoessel was suffering from anemia.

Through it all, the Russians have stayed out of the public debate. Their only contributions have been vague hints that the emission level was to be expected in a big city or, on the other hand, that they might be trying to block American listening devices. Nor have they suggested that the U.S. might be doing the same thing to the Soviet Embassy in Washington, which is a general assumption here—except that those who know won't say.

What they do say is that the U.S. has refrained from any counterintelligence action that might cause a danger, for the Soviet Embassy is in a very busy section of Washington.

Now Mr. Dobrynin holds the key. After several weeks' absence he has returned to his post and U.S. officials profess hope that he is prepared to end Soviet evasion on the question.

The aluminum screens are believed to have neutralized any health hazard from the emissions, according to one source. Even so, says another, the administration wants to remove any remaining psychological burden from the embassy staff.

A couple of weeks ought to determine whether Mr. Dobrynin has brought any answers or wants to negotiate. Sources on the periphery of the debate suggest one answer might be an agreement to hold down emissions on both sides—a face-saving approach without any necessary relationship to what either side might be doing.

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